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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY JOHN A. VOLPE, SECRETARY  
OF TRANSPORTATION, BEFORE THE INSTITUTE FOR RAPID TRANSIT,  
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AT 12:00 NOON

When I got your invitation a couple of weeks ago and one of my aides asked whether I wanted to go, I told him to be sure to put this occasion at the top of the list. If that indicates enthusiasm for public transportation then I stand revealed. I think the evidence of the last decade is overwhelming that mass transit is the direction to go if we expect to make any headway at all against the sickness of the cities.

Urban regions show every sign of social disorder known to man -- decay, violence and unrest; pollution, ugliness and crowding.

It's hard to believe that this country is 6,000 souls larger today than it was yesterday and will grow by another 6,000 people tomorrow and the day after that. To house them and provide the services they demand we will completely rebuild the face of urban America over the next 30 years -- that is more construction than in all the previous history of the Nation. But unless we act now the biggest roadblock to a better life for all of us will be in transportation -- the sick giant of the cities.

The demand for transportation services is rising even faster than population. Tomorrow, April 18, we shall contend with 10,000 more cars on the road than we have today. But I am sure I need not catalogue such facts for this group.

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The automobile is getting a lot of attention now because of air pollution that affects the lives and livelihood of millions of Americans. Even if we could cut pollution 100 percent overnight, however, the automobile

- would still be the dominant means of moving people in the cities,
- would still cause traffic jams,
- would still pre-empt valuable resources of open space, park and farm land, and induce serious revenue losses as taxable property is converted to highways and parking lots,
- would still escalate the cost of doing business.

It seems to me, gentlemen, that our excessive reliance on the automobile makes the creation of better, finer cities near to impossible.

And besides that, the automobile is not always available for 25 percent of our population that cannot drive -- the young, the old, the sick, the poor; nor does the automobile really meet the desires of those who would gladly abandon their unused horsepower if only they had another way to move about within our cities.

You may have noticed that I referred to mass transit as "public transportation." This phrase appeals to me because it highlights the essential nature and special responsibilities of mass transit. Public transportation is owned by -- and operated on behalf of -- the whole people, providing them services of great social significance that they cannot provide individually, and that usually cannot be provided at a profit by private companies.

There are three implied consequences of such a definition.

First, we ought to get rid of the idea once and for all that public transportation must make a profit at the fare-box. This is a holdover from the days when entrepreneurs ran the trolleys and the inter-urbans and had to make a profit to stay in business. (And you know what happened to them!) The prospect of a profit has been changed drastically by the automobile, as you well know.

My position is that public transit is so important that we must look at its financing much like any other public service. We don't expect the Army to make a profit. We don't exact user charges for police protection. The cost of public education is not paid only by students or parents.

These services are considered so important that the entire community must agree to share the burden of supporting them. Over the next few years I believe public transportation -- for the first time -- will be looked at from this larger and more sophisticated viewpoint.

Mind you I'm not advocating building public transportation systems designed to run up massive deficits. Far from it. Any service will get a better reception if it helps to pay for itself to a respectable degree. And

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I am convinced that properly designed and located public transportation will pay for itself -- or at least return substantial revenues -- in many instances. I submit that we have never really tested the public's fundamental attitude with truly modern public transportation services.

This brings me to my second consequence. I hope that when you -- the members of the Rapid Transit Institute -- think of public transportation you will purge from your minds the memory of conventional transit systems. Believe me -- if we just patch up the kind of subways and buses you find in New York City and Boston today, patronage will continue to drop. If people are given only the choice between ugliness and dirt in a crowded public conveyance, and ugliness and pollution from the privacy of their own cars, you know what the choice will be.

Instead, we have to cast our thinking in terms of what is possible with today's technology and the newer concepts that are looming on the very near horizon. The burgeoning success of our high-speed, inter-city trains in the Northeast Corridor is just the beginning. Any nation that can split the atom, deploy thousands of computer installations, and send three men around the moon ought to be able to provide better than the conditions we find on the Shirley Highway every morning. To claim otherwise is to evade the facts.

Over at the new Department of Transportation we are enthusiastic about the potential of several new experiments. One is the tracked, air-cushion vehicle, or TAC/V ("Tack-Vee"), for short. The TAC/V could carry 100 people at speeds ranging from 200-300 miles per hour. Its concrete guideways would cost less than conventional trackage to maintain.

Right now design and feasibility studies are being conducted by Grumman and GE, and we plan to open an industry-wide competition this summer to build a 20-mile prototype. The concept could be demonstrated as early as 1972, possibly running between the new Everglades jetport and downtown Miami.

Further in the future are gravitrains, falling of their own weight along underground channels and then swooping up again on a combination of their own momentum and pneumatic air -- repeating the process from station to station with record speed and efficiency. I'm afraid some of you older fellows may be saying that it sounds like science fiction, but there is no theoretical obstacle to development. The same goes for tube flight -- the concept of shooting air-cushion trains through tunnels along routes of intermediate length, as from Washington to New York.

The gravitrain could be practical with the development of cheap laser tunneling. "Tube flight" needs no tunnel at all -- the tubes could be placed on the surface. Obviously, gentlemen, the hurdles we have to leap are not so much technical as conceptual. We need your imagination; we need your creativity -- social as well as technical.

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None of the new methods I spoke of solve the greatest problem in the cities, the need for highly adaptable on-call systems for picking up people at their doorsteps and taking them with a minimum of stops en route to wherever they want to go. In this field, perhaps the most promising idea is the dial-a-bus. Again, we look to you -- and your industry -- for imagination, ideas, and investment in developing even more such new thinking, new ideas.

The third consequence of a broadly conceived public transportation system stems from this notion of flexibility. It is simply that urban transit today must serve the needs of those who most need a new mobility, and I refer particularly to the ghetto dwellers.

The word I am getting from around the country and from my talks with leaders in the black community is that being physically stuck in the slums -- unable to get out to where the jobs are -- is one of the leading causes of urban violence and unrest.

When you go back to your offices, pick up a route map of any mass transit system in any city in the country. The fact is that mass transit today does not provide cheap, convenient access to hospitals, government offices and training centers. It certainly provides no royal road to the skilled jobs that go begging in the suburbs.

If a ghetto worker has to get up at 6:00 a.m., spend one or two hours transferring among three different bus routes and pay a dollar and a quarter for the privilege, he is very likely to stay in bed and sneer at all the talk about suburban opportunity. So I say that a new clause guaranteeing mobility must be written into the bill of rights if our words about equality are to have any meaning.

Finally, I want to say that over the long-haul, we intend to spend whatever is necessary to provide a system of public transportation that is worthy of the name. We must have new kinds of financing, and a higher level of generosity. I will shortly be submitting to the President a proposal for an Urban Mass Transit Trust Fund, based upon the principle that has worked so well on behalf of our Federal Interstate Highway System.

As you know, President Nixon has placed such legislation on his "top ten" priority list.

I believe the time has come for real action in public transportation. The President has said that we must solve our transportation problem in the cities if the cities are to be saved as fit places for human habitation. Perhaps we cannot reach this goal in four years or in eight years. But with the firm support of public-spirited organizations like this one, we can make a decent beginning.

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